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A Grace

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still wears the SI trenchcoat. Hands in pockets,
cigarette in lips, one eye squinting at a curl
of smoke. . . . The posing is only partial—
Bogart never worked undercover vice in Harlem
or chased a racketeer down the frozen streets
of Buffalo. The flat cruelty of the mouth is real.
As my hunger for the tales was real, sometimes
outweighing a reticence trained in by Hoover
(whose scary pug face guarded the den wall),
and I'd get one bare bones cops and robbers
before bed. How much I wanted those shoulders!
—Level and wide enough to hold my sister
and me, one to a side. He'd do kip-ups,
brandys, one arm push-ups between flipping
hamburgers on our Levittown lawn, my friends
awed into quiet. This was about the time
I began to withdraw, amazed to find more love
for Kipling than hardball. Mixing my Gilbert
chemicals in the attic, stroking a wan guitar. . . .
I slip the photograph back under drafts of old
work, study my face in the bathroom mirror.
Enough resemblance to imagine us as brothers,
perhaps—the photograph the one to step in
when the reflection caused a fight in some bar.
Later, the reflection might compose a little some-
thing, a sweet poem, to smooth out the photograph's
wife. She'd be touchy, emotional, crisp shadow
to his strength. Mum guardian of his weakness.

A GRACE

Let's have no more *I remember*
poems, at least not until the self thaws out
and we can move easily in more than one direction.
So much lunatic pruning in a dead garden,

so much pretty blue smoke and mirrors. . . .
And let's have no more kneeling
for good reasons, dropping God's name
like a cast iron doorstep,

forcing Him into the shape of a tree,
say, which would much rather go on treeing.
Let's sit down at the table, and eat.
Pass the chicken, sauteed with onions,

pass the broccoli, its green aroma
curling from the plate. Pass the boiled
red potatoes that slice open
with warm sighs. Pass the spring

water and the wine, the butter and the pepper.
Quiet the children according to their
needs. Quiet the radio and TV, all appliances
of confusion, of *I will never solve these*

too painful and unending sorrows. Quiet
your opposite, as well as he or she
may be comforted. Quiet, quiet your own famished
heart. Let us fill ourselves in silence.

PRAYER TO WASP ON THE OCCASION OF ITS EXECUTION

You entered my face
like a whore's nails,
blew the skin out
red and dangerous
as a balloon
filled with gas.
Twelve years old,
I lurched
home, new pennies